

A STATEMENT OF THE
HOUSE OF BISHOPS

We have met in Philadelphia, two hundred years after the General Convention which gave us the first American Book of Common Prayer and the structures of our common life. Out of the confusion which prevailed among Anglicans during the separation from English rule emerged the first independent province in what we now know as the worldwide Anglican Communion. At this meeting we welcomed, among other new members, the first woman bishop in the Communion, The Right Reverend Barbara Harris. With her consecration, the canonical process begun in 1976 has been completed. The members of this House recognize that reality. We joyfully affirm ordained women--indeed all women--in the ministries which they exercise in and through the Church.

Within the Anglican Communion and indeed even within our own church, there is not a common theological mind or agreed practice on the matter of the ordination of women. We acknowledge with gratitude the action of the Lambeth Conference in calling for the appointment by the Archbishop of Canterbury of a Commission to monitor and encourage consultation throughout the Anglican Communion and to ensure open dialogue. We acknowledge that within Anglicanism those who believe that women should not be ordained hold a recognized theological position. In our deliberations, we have heard the voice of those faithful lay people, bishops, priests and deacons, members of the Episcopal Church who hold that view, and we affirm them as loyal members of the family.

We are grateful for the initiatives of the Presiding Bishop in his pastoral efforts during the past year to reach out to all parts of the church as they have responded to the election of Bishop Harris. His homilies at our daily Eucharists on the theme "Beyond Anger" and our shared Bible study each day have led us to discern afresh the dimensions of our community of faith and to adopt this statement of our intention to live together. We intend to trust one another, to listen to one another, and to seek to model this charity to the whole Church.

THE PRIMATES REPORT AS A MODEL FOR LIFE TOGETHER

Our common study of the Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate 1989 (The Primates Report) leads us to recommend its theological meditation on koinonia* as well as its pastoral guidelines as a model for life together during this time of graceful challenge and opportunity.

We make particular reference to the way in which the Commission's report centers its pastoral guidelines within the context of theological reflection and the ministry of bishops. Referring to the 1988 Lambeth

*Life of God, life in community of faith.

Conference Report "Mission and Ministry", it describes the ministry of a bishop as:

- a symbol of the unity of the Church and its mission;
- a teacher and defender of the faith;
- a pastor of the pastors and of the laity;
- an enabler in the preaching of the Word and in the
administration of the Sacraments;
- a leader in mission and an initiator of outreach to the world;
- a shepherd who nurtures and cares for the flock of God;
- a physician to whom are brought the wounds of society;
- a voice of conscience within the society;
- a prophet who proclaims the justice of God in the context of the
Gospel;
- a head of the family in its wholeness, its misery and its joy.

These elements of episcopal ministry have profound implications for the ways in which individual bishops relate to one another, parishes relate to their bishop, and dioceses relate to one another in responding faithfully to the Gospel challenge to seek at all times the deepest level of communion with God and community with one another.

In this regard we have taken to heart Resolution 72 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference which reads as follows:

"This conference:

1. Reaffirms its unity in the historical position of respect for diocesan boundaries and the authority of bishops within those boundaries; and in the light of the above
2. Affirms that it is deemed inappropriate behavior for any bishop or priest of this Communion to exercise episcopal or pastoral ministry within another diocese without first obtaining the permission and invitation of the ecclesial authority thereof."

This Lambeth resolution reflects Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church.

OUR CONTINUING JOURNEY

In the light of all this, we recognize the need to be true to our sense of structure and diocesan boundaries. There is a need as well to be pastorally sensitive to those who do not accept the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. In these matters we will continue to carry with us the respect, courtesy and love for one another that has been so much a part of this meeting. This grace-filled bond of collegiality will help us

to share each other's burdens and sufferings and thereby bear witness to the life of loving communion with God who suffers with us, for us and even at our hands.

We leave with a renewed sense that the power of God's love which we have shared impels us to ministry in the midst of a world torn by racism, poverty, and gross injustice.

"With the healing of division,
with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
with the power to love and witness,
with the peace beyond compare:
come, Holy Spirit, come!"

(Hymnal 1982, 513, v.3)